

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Environmental Affairs
Meeting on 28 January 2008

Proposed overseas duty visit

Purpose

This paper invites members to note the proposal for the Panel on Environmental Affairs (the Panel) to conduct an overseas duty visit to Singapore to learn the experience in controlling idling vehicles with running engines.

Background

2. In November 2007, the Administration embarked a five-month consultation exercise on the introduction of a statutory ban on idling engines. The move is part of the Administration's package of measures to curb emissions from vehicles which are the second largest source of air pollution in Hong Kong. It is proposed that as a general rule, a statutory ban should be imposed on idling vehicles territory-wide. If a motorist does not switch off the engine of his vehicle when it is idled, he commits a contravention and will be issued with a fixed penalty ticket. Making reference to overseas practice, exemptions may be given to –

- (a) vehicles which stop at the roadside for active boarding or alighting;
- (b) the first two taxis at a taxi stand and the first two public light buses (PLBs) at a PLB stand;
- (c) taxis, PLBs or buses at their designated stops or stands either on-street or at termini, which are in the process of passenger boarding or alighting. The exemption will also be given to taxis and PLBs in a moving queue at their designated stops, stands or termini for their turns to pick up passengers;
- (d) vehicles remaining motionless because of traffic conditions, including traffic congestion, accidents and stopping as directed by traffic signs and marking, traffic lights or police officers;

- (e) security transit vehicles operated by a security company holding a valid Security Company Licence issued by the Security and Guarding Services Industry Authority under the Security and Guarding Services Ordinance (Cap 460) for the provision of armoured transportation services;
- (f) vehicles which are required to run their engines, including on-board auxiliary engines, for some ancillary purposes other than providing air-conditioning for comfort of drivers or passengers;
- (g) vehicles of disciplinary forces and other emergency vehicles while engaged in operation activities, including training activities; and
- (h) vehicles engaged in a parade or any other event authorized by the Transport Department.

To cater for the unique requirements of the local community, it is proposed that on the advice of the Secretary for the Environment, the Government may exempt, by publishing a notice in the Gazette, particular zones or particular periods of time from the statutory ban to cater for the varying conditions of particular districts.

3. The Panel held three meetings on 26 November 2007, 8 and 16 January 2008 to discuss the proposed ban. Deputations, including the affected trades and green groups, were invited to express their views at the latter two meetings. While there was general support for the proposed ban from the green groups, the trades were strongly opposed to the proposal. They pointed out that the need to frequently switch off and restart their engines in order to comply with the ban would generate more emissions and shorten the life span of the starter and car battery, the increase in such waste to be disposed of at landfills would create another environmental problem. There were also certain types of engines which genuinely required idling time during starting and switching off. Coaches with fixed windows had no choice but to keep their engines running while idling to keep the air-conditioning on for the comfort of passengers. The proposed ban would unduly affect the trades.

The proposed overseas duty visit

4. Given the far-reaching implications of the proposed ban on motorists and the trades' concerns, some members consider that a visit to countries which have introduced a statutory ban on idling vehicles would facilitate their understanding on how the ban should be implemented to address public concerns and the effectiveness of the ban to improve air quality.

Proposed place to be visited

5. One of the places which have implemented a statutory ban on idling vehicles and have hot and humid summer like Hong Kong is Singapore. The Environmental Pollution Control (Vehicular Emissions) Regulations of Singapore stipulates, among other things, that the driver of every motor vehicle shall, when the vehicle is stationary for reasons other than traffic conditions, stop the engine or other machinery attached to or forming part of the vehicle. Any person who fails to comply with the requirement shall be guilty of an offence. However, it is worth noting that according to the information given by the Administration, there was no promotional or educational programme launched before the implementation of the ban. No one has been prosecuted for violating the regulation since its implementation in 1999. The Singaporean Government has been taking an educational approach, coupled with the issue of advisories and warning letters, to encourage drivers to switch off the engines of their vehicles while waiting. It also works with large fleet owners, such as tourist bus associations and taxi operators, to bring across the message of switching off engines to their drivers.

Proposed timing for the visit

6. As the 2007-2008 session will be the last session of the current term, it is anticipated that legislation scrutiny work would reach its peak from April 2008 until the end of the session. Therefore, it would be more desirable for the visit to take place before the Easter break. In view of the close proximity of Singapore to Hong Kong, a two-day visit will likely be sufficient for members to meet and exchange views with representatives of the relevant parties on the statutory ban, if the Panel decides to conduct the visit.

7. To avoid clashing with meetings of the Council and House Committee (HC), members may consider conducting the duty visit from 13 to 14 March 2008 since there will not be a HC meeting on 14 March. If the proposed period is not feasible, members may consider conducting the visit on any period covering a Sunday and a Monday.

Advice sought

8. Members are invited to consider -

- (a) whether to support the proposed overseas duty visit and if so, the date for the duty visit; and
- (b) whether non-Panel Members should be invited to join the duty visit.

Way forward

9. Pursuant to the circular on overseas duty visits issued by the Secretary General on 3 September 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(1)2314/06-07), Panels and other committees are requested to get approval from HC for conducting overseas duty visits before mid-December 2007. Given that the deadline has already been overdue, should the Panel agree to conduct the duty visit, the Panel may wish to seek approval from HC before the Secretariat proceeds with the issue of circular to invite members to indicate interest in joining the duty visit and the liaison work with the relevant Consulate-General and Economic and Trade Offices.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
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